

# Milwaukee

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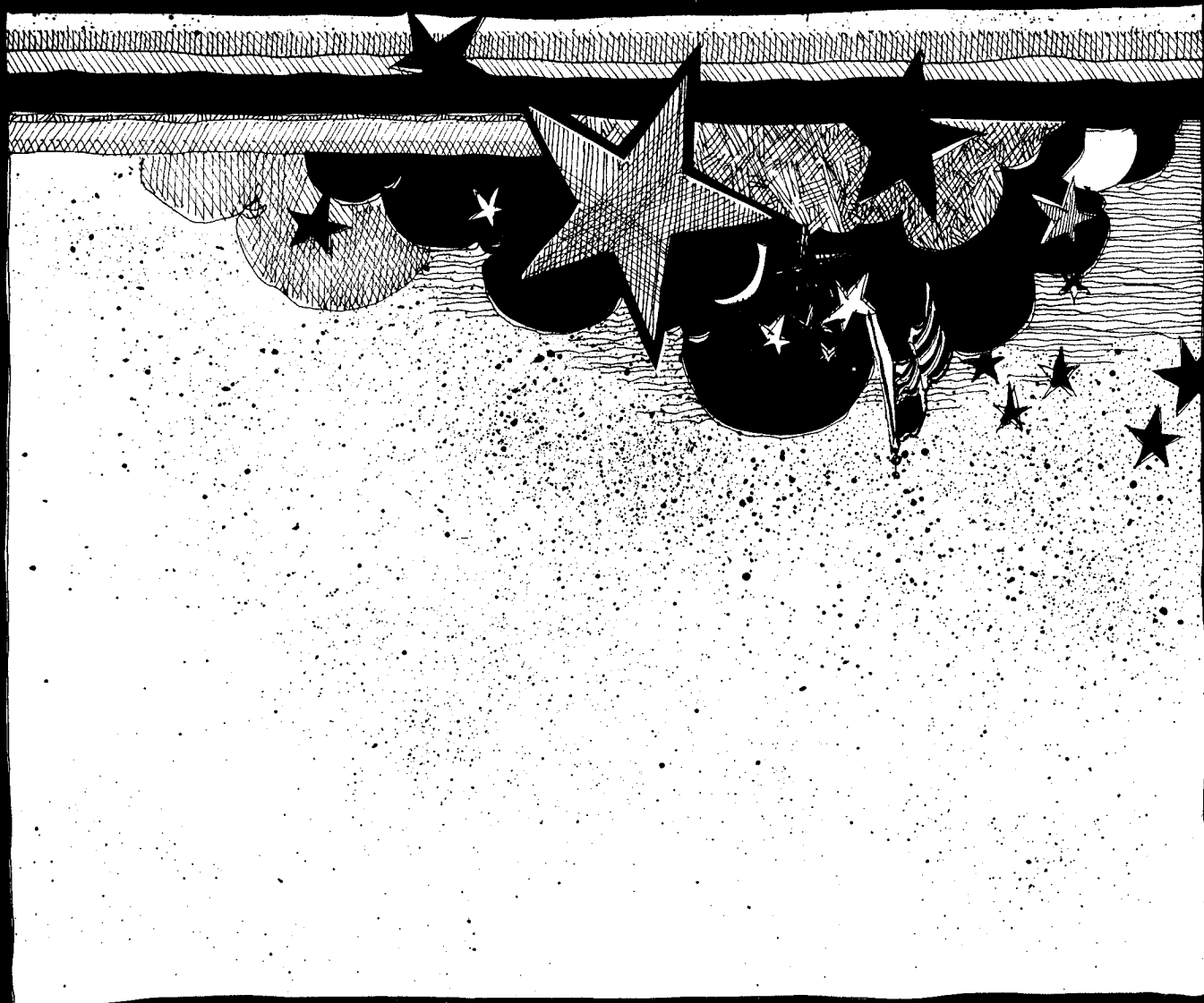
July 'is summerfest month in Milwaukee for party lovers, music lovers and food fanatics. Last year Summerfest '78 catered to 720,000 guests from all over the country, and more are expected this year. Photographer Dave Gess captured the excitement at the main stage of Milwaukee's biggest party

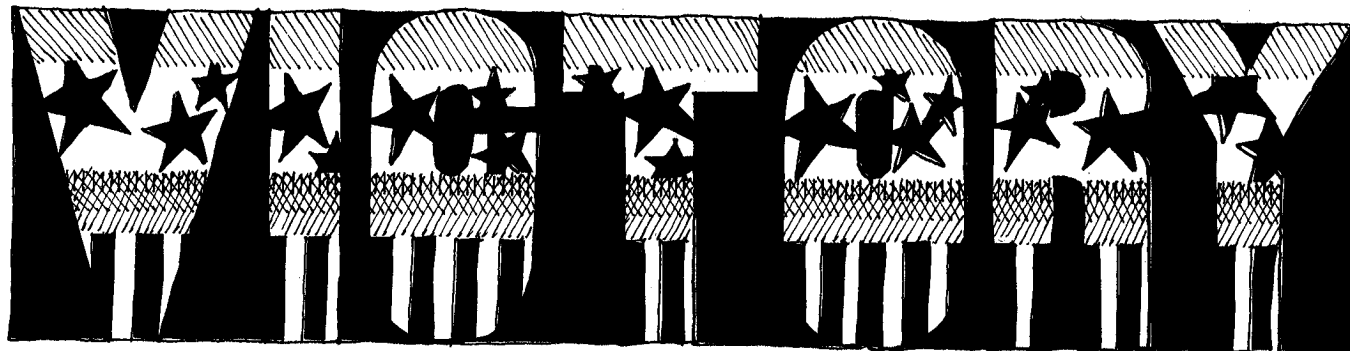


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Fiction by Jack Ritchie/Illustrations by Steve Slaske

**T**heir rocket ships pulled up just out of the range of our own defenses and commenced firing. The bombardment began in the afternoon and continued on into the night.

We were prisoners — Colonel Skinner, Dr. Beane, the crew members of our ship, and I — prisoners under guard. There was nothing we could do to help our own forces. We could but watch, and hope, and wait.

Their flotilla had attacked our coast barely a month before. From the very beginning, our resistance had been feeble. The enemy had been able to crawl over the land, destroying, burning and taking hostages. Dr. Beane had been one of them.

Dr. Beane's family had come to me begging that I try to regain his freedom. Surely, they reasoned, if I, an important government official, carefully approached the enemy under a flag of truce, they would at least talk to me. Surely they would listen to reason. Dr. Beane represented no threat to them free. He could harm them in no way.

I had had misgivings about the entire venture. However, in good conscience, I could not refuse them. I would at least try, and I was joined in my errand by Colonel Skinner who accompanied me attired in civilian clothes.

Our white flag had been honored and they had listened equably enough, though it was obvious to me that they regarded us all with a certain condescension. But then, perhaps because of our insignificance to them, or perhaps because they were just bored listening to us, they indicated that we could leave and take Dr. Beane with us.

But our joy had been short-lived. Almost as soon as permission had been granted, it was withdrawn. Guards had boarded our craft and now we stood helpless spectators to the bombardment.

Comet-like arcs of light streaked across the firmament and then burst into fearsome explosions as they found their targets.

Dr. Beane sighed. "We have not been able to claim a single victory since the invasion began."

Colonel Skinner's voice was grim. "We have nothing in our arsenal like their rocket vessels. In perfect safety, they can take their time about blasting everything and everyone into submission. We have not been able to reach them at all."

The din of the bombardment had become increasingly deafening and when we spoke it was necessary to raise our voices.

Dr. Beane shook his head sadly. "Is there no way to stop them?"

"There must be," Colonel Skinner said. "If not here, then somewhere else. We cannot be defeated. We will not be."

The hours passed slowly. Ten o'clock. Eleven.

I noticed Colonel Skinner covertly studying our guards.

Was he thinking of some plan of escape? Could the guards be overpowered? They did not seem particularly awesome.

But no, I thought. We cannot attempt an escape. Ours was a civilian crew. Perhaps if our men had been military, something of that nature might be risked. But it would be insanity to attempt such with an untrained, undisciplined crew.

And even if we did succeed in overpowering our guards, what then? We were still in the midst of the enemy fleet. How could we possibly escape their notice as we fled? We would be overtaken and brought back. Or, more likely, their rockets would simply turn in our direction and we would be blasted into oblivion.

No, we were helpless captives. We could do nothing but wait and hope for the benevolence of our captors.

Dr. Beane frowned. "Our return fire has slackened."

Colonel Skinner shrugged. "What difference does that really make? We might as well have been throwing stones at the enemy."

And soon our fire ceased entirely. However, the invader's bombardment continued unabated until one in the morning, and then suddenly all firing ceased.

We stared ahead — sobered by the new silence, the new darkness — trying to make out what lay beyond.

Dr. Beane's voice was tired. "It's all over with, isn't it? They must have surrendered. Those who survived."

The silence now became almost unbearable. We remained staring in the direction of what was — or had been — our strong point of resistance. We could see only tongues of fires darting up here and there.

The remaining hours of the night passed slowly. We made no move to retire, to sleep. We could not.

The mist moved in, obscuring our limited vision, and a steady drizzle of rain formed in the air.

Slowly, slowly, the night released its grip. Feeble gray light now appeared in the east.

Our eyes strained, attempting to penetrate the mist.

It was Colonel Skinner who spoke first. "It's still there. It's still there. They haven't surrendered."

Yes, I saw it too and I experienced a sudden rush of emotion. I searched frantically through my pockets until I found paper and a stub of pencil.

Dr. Beane regarded me with surprise. "Writing a letter at a time like this, Mr. Key?"

The words seemed to flow. *O, say can you see, by the dawn's early light...*

I looked up for a moment at our flag still fluttering proudly over Fort McHenry... *what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming. And the rockets red glare, of bombs bursting in air...*

As I wrote, I wondered if anyone else would ever read my words.

Or remember them.